Q

Qāf

1. Qāf in Arabic and Semitic

Qāf is the name of the 21st letter of the Arabic alphabet. In surveys of Modern Standard Arabic, /q/ is regularly described as a voiceless velar or uvular plosive/stop (cf., e.g., Kästner 1981:45–46). While this description reflects the pronunciation in Modern Standard Arabic and in some dialects, it is very likely that the uvular stop regularly transcribed as *q* in Arabic linguistics was a nonemphatic (nonvelarized) voiced counterpart to *k* (IPA [ɢ]) (cf., e.g., Versteegh 2001:21). As one of the *ḥurūf ʾaqṣā l-lisān* 'the sounds at the remotest part of the tongue', Ibn Jinnī groups *q* together with *k* and *j* in the context of discussing co-occurrence restrictions within the root (cf. Fleisch 1958a; Bakalla 1982:189). In a global survey of phoneme systems in modern times, Maddieson (1984:214) lists a long voiced velar plosive /g:/ as being specific for Arabic (dialects), Somali, Punjabi, and Shilha. Taking a wider Semiticist's perspective, the variety of pronunciations of /q/ has also been attested elsewhere, both diachronically and synchronically. In the Akkadian writing system, /q/ and /g/ were not systematically distinguished (cf. von Soden 1995:34; Lipiński 2001:144–145), and there was only one sign for the CV-sequences *ag, ak*, and *aq*. Rather than reflecting inherent 'weaknesses' of the Sumero-Akkadian syllabary, this circumstance may well testify to an early variety of pronunciation as is also present in the modern Arabic dialects. Whereas the velar quality of Arabic /q/, as pronounced in Modern Standard Arabic, corresponds to glottalization in modern Ethio-Semitic ([kˀ]), it is also the case that Arabic and Gəʿəz *qatala* evolved to *gäddalä* in modern Ethio-Semitic (unless the latter verb is associated with the root *g-d-l*, as in Hebrew; cf. Leslau 1987:452).

/q/ has straightforward correspondences across Semitic, with the aforementioned postglottalized variant [kˀ] in modern Ethio-Semitic. Old Aramaic /ʿ/ also has a variant /q/ in some lexical items, e.g. *ʾarʿā* and *ʾarqā* 'earth'. Putting this observation into context, Lipiński (2001:147) notes that a spectographic analysis shows that [q] is situated somewhere on a scale between [d] and [ʕ]. The letter <q> is also used to render <k> in (mainly Greek) loanwords in Hebrew and Aramaic so as to avoid postvocalic spirantization, as well as in loanwords that made it into Arabic via Syriac (e.g. *qānūn* < *kanṓn*). But <q> was also used in Arabic to render a number of words written with <g> in the source language, e.g. *qibṭī* 'Copt(ic)' < *aigúptios*.

2. Qāf in Classical Arabic

The fact that /q/ was an unaspirated stop with both voiced and voiceless variants at an early stage of the history of Arabic can be deduced from general linguistic considerations and from information provided by the Arab grammarians (on the importance of Sībawayhi's *Kitāb* for historical Arabic dialectology in general, see Levin 1999). Blanc (1969), taking up proposals made by Jean Cantineau and André Martinet, argues in terms of a linguistic push-chain mechanism. An early Semitic /g/ as part of a homorganic velar triad of phonemes /g-

k-q/, was fronted to [g^j], [j], etc., as Semitic /q/ had developed mainly in a Bedouin milieu toward [ɢ], thus creating homophones, e.g. *faqr* 'poverty' vs. *fagr* 'dawn', which were to be avoided. Thus, a dialectal split between a *qāf ġayr maʿqūda* 'non-tied *q*', corresponding to [q], and a *qāf maʿqūda* 'tied *q*', corresponding to [ɢ] and sometimes even [k], emerged (Blanc 1969:22). Blanc (1969:29–30) sketches the following three-stage scenario, reflecting the assumed push-chain process within the velar phoneme inventory:

i. Proto-Arabic and Common Semitic

	q	
ġ	*g*	–
x	*k*	*š*

ii. Earliest Arabic

ġ	*q*	*g*	–
x	–	*k*	*š*

iii. Oldest Arabic (*ʿarabiyya*)

ġ	*q*	–	g^y
x	–	*k*	*š*

From the perspective of native Arab(ic) grammar, it is noteworthy that Sībawayhi (*Kitāb* §565) classifies /q/ among the → *majhūra* consonants, which are opposed to the *mahmūsa* consonants (cf., e.g., Al-Nassir 1993:36–41; Carter 2004:126). Except for the consonants /q/ and /ṭ/ in their modern pronunciation, Sībawayhi's opposition between *majhūra* vs. *mahmūsa* corresponds exactly to the modern opposition [voiced] vs. [devoiced] (cf., e.g., Fleisch 1958b; Odisho 1988), *pace* Lipiński (2001:144), who conceptualizes *majhūra* as 'fortis' vs. 'lenis'. Following Garbell (1958), Blanc (1967:306–307) suggested the terms 'nonbreathed' for *majhūr(a)*, and 'breathed' for *mahmūs(a)*, in an attempt to reconcile the terminology in Arabic grammatical sources with modern concepts.

Regarding the phonetic quality of /q/, Bravmann (1934:45) quotes from the *Tāj al-ʿarūs* (s.v. *qāf*): *wa-hiya ʾamtanu l-ḥurūfi wa-ʾaṣaḥḥuhā jarsan* 'it [sc. *q*] is the most solid of the sounds and the most real in terms of tone', a definition which in all its vagueness is compatible with both the characterization by the Arab grammarians and the evidence in modern times, pointing to a higher sonority of [q] in comparison with [k]. Beyond the evidence adduced above, there is also circumstantial evidence in written Arabic that compels us to view the voiced pronunciation /q/ as at least one statistically significant variant in the early stages of Arabic. Brockelmann (1908:121), referring to az-Zamaxšarī's *Mufaṣṣal* (§ 695b), adduces the Old Arabic variant *zaqar* of *saqar* 'fire in hell', which can be best explained by suprasegmental assimilation with respect to voicing (*s* < *z*, in this case presupposing a voiced [q]).

While /q/ is clearly not an 'emphatic' consonant (pronounced with → *ʾiṭbāq*, i.e. [+A(dvanced)T(ongue)R(oot)]), as evidenced by Form VIII verbs like *iqtaraba* 'to draw near', in which the *t*-infix is not partially assimilated with respect to emphasis (cf. Versteegh 2001:21), it does belong, together with /x/, /ġ/, and the four emphatics to the *ḥurūf mustaʿliya* 'ascending sounds'. These consonants have the effect of emphaticizing preceding nonemphatic consonants, as in *sabaqtu* > *ṣabaqtu* 'I preceded', due to their postvelar articulation (cf. Blanc 1969:19).

3. *Qāf* in the Arabic dialects

The array of different pronunciations of /q/, i.e. unvoiced, voiced, palatalized, or even plain [k], dates well back in history (cf. Rabin 1951:55–56, 125–126). Fischer and Jastrow (1980:52), as well as Kaye and Rosenhouse (1997:270), provide an overview of this broad scope of pronunciation. While the 'school pronunciation' of /q/ is indeed attested in some Syrian, Mesopotamian, and North African dialects, /q/ surfaces as [k] in those dialects (e.g. central Palestinian ones) which have palatalized original /k/. In many Bedouin dialects as well as in most of the Arabian Peninsula, /q/ surfaces as [ɢ], [dʒ], or even as [dz]. Fricative [ʏ] is attested in some Mesopotamian dialects (cf. Fischer and Jastrow 1980:143), where [q] and [ʏ] are 'switched' in pronunciation (cf. also Al-Nassir 1993:40). Interestingly, some dialects in Yemen and the central Najd have palatalized [dʒ] for /q/ and [tʃ] for /k/ (→ *kaškaša*), a parallelism that reflects again the assumed old voiced quality of /q/. A voiceless glottal stop [ʔ] is the most common reflex of /q/ in the cities around the Mediterranean as well as in most of Syria and Lebanon. This sound shift may be

explained by the glottal co-occlusion that sometimes accompanies the pronunciation of voiceless [q] (cf. Blanc 1969:26). Some place-names, as well as cultural and religious terms, do not undergo this sound change, notably *al-qāhira* 'Cairo' and *al-qur'ān* 'the *Qur'ān*' ('Jerusalem', however, winds up phonetically as [alʔuds]). Sociolinguistic factors can affect the pronunciation of /q/ as well. Blanc (1969:22) mentions a passage in Ibn Xaldūn's *Muqaddima* where the sociolinguistic implications of the *q/g* split are discussed. Versteegh (2001:137–138) draws attention to the fact that the Muslim *gilit* dialect of the Baghdad area has had a higher prestige than *qəltu* dialects of the province, even though the pronunciation [q] is more closely associated with Classical Arabic. The phonetic surface [G] being one of the shibboleths of Bedouin pronunciation, this observation underlines once more the role of the Bedouin as arbiters in linguistic matters.

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Qawl → Kalām

Qəltu Arabic → Iraq


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